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THE RECENT LITERATURE UPON THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

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No other doctrine of Christian theology has been regarded as more important than the doctrine that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. It has often been affirmed that upon this doctrine the church was founded; that it is the one great fact which binds together the life of Jesus in the flesh and his eternal life at the right hand of God; which confirms his teaching and his high claims; which gives to men the right to love and worship him with a supreme devotion, to believe in his continued ministration to his people, to anticipate his return to perfect and govern his kingdom in the earth, and to rest in the assurance of their own immortal life with him. It is not strange, therefore, that in the flux of modern thought many should turn their attention to this significant doctrine. It is, moreover, not only an important article of the Christian faith, but it is also one in the support and interpretation of which various lines of investigation are involved. It is, first of all, a historical question, which demands a careful examination of witnesses and testing of evidence; it has come to be, of late at least, a psychological question, demanding careful analysis of the state of mind of the early witnesses, the accumulation and comparison of other cases in which men and women have believed that they saw the forms and heard the voices of the departed. The hypotheses suggested by the experiments of psychical research have been thought by some to throw at least a dim and uncertain light upon this doctrine; and, further, the question whether there is a vital

and necessary connection between a firm conviction of the bodily resurrection of Jesus and a confident and aggressive Christian faith has come to seem to some an open question, demanding careful and discriminating examination. It is not surprising, therefore, that the literature upon this subject should have much increased during the last fifteen or twenty years, nor that the methods of discussion and the conclusions reached by able and sincere men should differ widely. It is the purpose of this article to give some account of these recent discussions, without attempting to review or criticise in detail the individual books and monographs and the articles in various English and German periodicals which have been published in such large numbers.

There are three lines of evidence which are appealed to in support of the conviction that Jesus rose from the dead. The first is the testimony that, upon the Sunday morning which followed the placing of his body in the tomb, the body had disappeared; the second is the testimony that soon after this discovery certain persons and groups of persons affirmed that they had received evidence that Jesus was living, and had revealed himself to them and communicated with them; the third is that the impression which Jesus had made during his life before his crucifixion, the scheme of ministration which he outlined for himself, the assurances which he gave of his return to take up again and perfect his work, and the history of Christianity for the past centuries, confirm this testimony and establish this fact. Each of these arguments receives critical examination in the light of modern knowledge and convictions.

How much evidence is there that the tomb in which the body had been laid on Friday evening was empty on Sunday morning? There is no doubt that the four Evangelists when they wrote their Gospels believed this. But the earliest of these Evangelists wrote not less than thirty-five years after the event, and at least two of the others substantially repeat his statement, though with some modifications due perhaps to other traditions. Apparently we have at most but two reports which are in any sense independent. All these Gospels were written not only long after the events but far from the scene where it was believed they occurred. So far as the witnesses themselves are concerned, they were, according to these different statements, one, two, three, or more than three,

women, and, in one Gospel, two men. All these witnesses, with perhaps one exception, had disappeared before the records in their present form were made. Of Mary Magdalene and her companions we are told nothing after that eventful morning; none of the writers of the Gospels claim to have interrogated her, nor is it probable that more than one of them ever saw her or any one of the women who are associated with her. Moreover, according to the accounts given, Mary and her friends were not in a position nor in a state of mind to make careful observations or to correct hasty conclusions. They saw, as they thought, a vision of angels; according to one report there was a great earthquake; an angel rolled the stone away and sat upon it, from whom lightnings flashed and whose robe glistened like snow, while the tomb was surrounded by prostrate forms of panic-stricken soldiers. The other reports are not so graphic and startling, and these features are regarded by many as embellishments of the earlier and simpler tradition; but these features suggest the unfitness of these women to give testimony to the state of the grave, or the want of care and discrimination in the man who put their testimony on record. Indeed, in the First Gospel the women do not enter or even inspect the tomb.

The earlier and calmer report given in the Gospel of Mark affirms that they entered the tomb, and were invited by the young man to view the place where the body had been laid; but, strangely enough, the result of their inspection is not given. The Gospel of Luke tells the story in a way which implies still less excitement and more definite testimony. At the beginning of the scene the women enter the tomb, and find not the body of the Lord Jesus, after which "two men" appear and speak to them. In the Fourth Gospel, Mary comes to the tomb while it is yet dark, sees that the stone is removed, and without inspection infers at once that the body has been removed. She runs away, but returns later and looks into the tomb, and sees two angels, who address her. It is not strange that such records of testimony even to so simple a fact—a fact so easily tested as the vacant place in the tomb—should excite suspicion and doubt.

The other witnesses, according to the Fourth Gospel, are Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. It is reported that they

both entered the tomb, saw the grave-clothes and took careful note of them, and then went away. This is plain and simple; and it is neither contradicted, reconstructed, nor confirmed in the other Gospels. Indeed, though we have in the New Testament one epistle which seems to have come from Peter, several discourses attributed to him, and two references to him as one who had seen the risen Lord, we have no confirmation of this inspection of the tomb, unless it be the quotation from a Psalm in Acts 2 24, which seems, indeed, to express a Christian's conviction rather than testimony to a fact observed; and, although we have several other writings which came at least from the circle to which the other disciple belonged, there is no further reference to the discovery at the open grave.

This is all the evidence, in the form of testimony to an observed fact, that has been preserved. It is said that Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 15 4 shows that he believed that the body must have disappeared from the grave. This inference seems probable, not only from the connection of the sentences, "he was buried," and "he hath been raised on the third day," but also from what we must believe to be Paul's idea of the resurrection. But that is his theory or explanation of a religious truth; it is not either direct or indirect testimony to a fact observed.

It is held by some that we have, in addition to these statements of the Gospels, the indirect evidence which comes from the silence of those who criticised and opposed the early proclamation of the resurrection. Latham affirms that "all Jerusalem was stirred by the empty tomb." He thinks that the story was told far and wide by the men who saw it.¹ Of this there is no evidence. According to the Acts, the first open proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus was on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the burial—a period during which many things may have happened. Nor is there any evidence, or any reason to believe, that even then, or later, any systematic, careful effort was made to meet the claim that Jesus' dead body had revived. If the grave was examined by any one, friend or foe, no report of it has been preserved; and the accounts of controversies with the Jews and prosecutions by courts at Jerusalem in the days of the first preaching of the gospel are very meagre,

¹ The Risen Master, pp. 17, 76-86.

and were put in their present form many years after the events occurred. It is not surprising that such evidence as is preserved upon this point seems to some recent writers, including Harnack,² Briggs,³ Loisy,⁴ and Henson,⁵ to be indecisive; while others equally sincere and independent—among them von Dobschütz,⁶ Riggenbach,⁷ Rohrbach,⁸ Schwartzkopff,⁹ Stapfer,¹⁰ and Oscar Holtzmann¹¹—regard the empty grave as an established fact.

But even if there be satisfactory evidence that the body was not in the tomb on that Sunday morning, does that fact go far towards proving that it had been restored to life? The Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Peter, and the Acts of Pilate, state that a guard was stationed to prevent the removal of the body. But there is no evidence that the other Evangelists knew of this tradition: if they did, they ignored or rejected it. The incidents at the tomb which they record would seem impossible if wakeful guards were keeping watch, or guards who, "as dead men," were lying on the ground. Moreover, according to the report in Matthew, the grave remained entirely unguarded for the first night after the burial. If either friends or foes desired to remove the body, they would most naturally do so during that first night. That this was done by the disciples, who subsequently proclaimed the resurrection of their Lord, as the stupid slander of their enemies afterwards affirmed, is hardly considered by any modern critic of serious mind. That the Jewish Sanhedrin, or some irresponsible persons, desiring to inflict indignity upon Jesus or pain upon his friends, desecrated the grave, seems to be forbidden by what we know of the state of mind of these officials and persons as well as by the subsequent history. But, excluding such impossible or improbable suggestions, there still remain several ways of accounting for the disappearance of the body. Some friend in Jerusalem—such a man as Nicodemus—perhaps not at all acquainted with the disciples and women from

² History of Dogma, I, 85.

³ Expositor, April, 1905, p. 249.

⁴ The Gospel and the Church, p. 131.

⁵ Hibbert Journal, II, 489.

⁶ Ostern und Pfingsten, p. 21.

⁷ Die Auferstehung Jesu, p. 18.

⁸ Die Berichte über die Auferstehung Jesu Christi, p. 83.

⁹ Monist, October, 1900, p. 7.

¹⁰ The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, p. 189.

¹¹ Life of Jesus, p. 499.

Galilee, may have removed it to some less public place; or Pilate—perhaps with Herod's advice—may have ordered its removal; or, as Lake suggests,¹² the women, in the dim light of early morning and in an unfamiliar region, may have come to the wrong tomb; or perhaps the right explanation is preserved in Mary's suggestion of the gardener—evidently she or the Evangelist thought this entirely possible. Even so confident a believer in the resurrection as Latham does not hesitate to say: "There was, as has been said, nothing very surprising in the fact that the body should have been taken away; it might even have been removed by Joseph and Nicodemus themselves, for the place of interment close to the city had only been chosen because time pressed; and a less accessible spot might be thought preferable."¹³

So much may be said concerning the impression which the testimony to the disappearance of the body from the grave makes upon the minds of critics of our own day of various shades of conviction. The connection supposed to exist between the disappearance of the body and the subsequent revelation of the living Master will be considered later.

What is the real weight of the evidence that after his death and burial Jesus revealed himself to certain of his friends and disciples? Testimony to this is contained in three of our four canonical Gospels; and there can be no doubt that the author of the Gospel of Mark added, or intended to add, at the end of his Gospel, the report of one or more such appearances. The supplement to that Gospel, of early though uncertain origin, the fragments of the Gospel according to the Hebrews and of the Gospel of Peter, and other early documents, repeat or add to this testimony. Earliest and most weighty of all is the Apostle Paul's summary in 1 Cor. 15 3-8 of such appearances, supplemented by his own experience. In this paragraph we have very early tradition, put on record by a man of unusual intelligence who was personally acquainted with at least some of the witnesses; and this tradition is confirmed and interpreted by the scene in which the author himself participated. This more direct testimony is supported by many incidental refer-

¹² *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, pp. 250-252.

¹³ *The Risen Master*, p. 40.

ences to the resurrection in the Acts, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse, and in writings preserved from the earliest Christian literature. This evidence is so full and strong, and so well endures the severe tests to which modern historical investigation compels it to submit, that nearly all recent critics admit its conclusive force. That certain honest and intelligent persons believed that they had seen the Lord Jesus alive after his death and burial may be accepted as established for our generation. (See Schmiedel,¹⁴ Turner,¹⁵ O. Holtzmann,¹⁶ Lake,¹⁷ and many others.)

But, admitting and maintaining this, we are compelled to observe that we are dealing simply with the conviction of certain persons who lived and died in the distant past. We cannot claim that these witnesses were so enlightened that they could make no mistakes, or that those who received, transmitted, and recorded their testimony were preserved from errors in memory or inaccuracy in statement; and we know that neither they themselves nor any of their contemporaries tested their experiences in any careful, scientific way. We deal directly only with convictions, while we strive to ascertain the facts which lie behind them. We must hold, however, that there were certain facts, there were causes which produced these convictions; and the duty of every serious scholar is to seek for those facts, and to discover, if possible, the explanation or hypothesis which best accounts for these experiences.

Various explanations are presented in recent literature: *first*, the body of Jesus which was buried was, in some form, reanimated, and became again the dwelling-place of his spirit; or, *second*, Jesus, as a purely spiritual being—or his heavenly Father—produced in some extraordinary way upon the minds of chosen witnesses impressions which not only convinced them that he was alive, but assumed in their mental vision a form which they identified with his former bodily form; or, *third*, the deep impression which he had made upon their minds, the faith in himself which he had kindled, the belief that he was indeed the Messiah and would fulfil his promise to return and complete the work he had begun, so

¹⁴ Encyclopædia Biblica, IV, col. 4061.

¹⁵ Hibbert Journal, IV, 382.

¹⁶ Life of Jesus, p. 505.

¹⁷ The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, p. 227.

wrought in their souls that in moments of excitement, of strong desire and hope, they seemed to see the Master with them again as of old, encouraging and instructing them. No sharp lines of separation can be drawn between these three hypotheses—they shade into one another; but they may be roughly classified as the theory of a real bodily resurrection, the theory of objective visions, and the theory of subjective visions.

The great majority of Christians of ancient and modern times have doubtless believed that the body of Jesus was raised from the dead. The writers of the Gospels certainly thought so, and it is probable that Paul thought of the restored, or continued, life of Jesus in the same way. Many Christians have apparently supposed that the body was restored to its former condition; could be weighed and handled, could receive food, and wear clothing. This view appears even in the Gospels, though there it is blended or confused with another conception. Paul, however, seems to reject the idea that the body of the risen Jesus consisted in any sense or degree of the earthly matter which had been buried: it was not the body which was sown, not a body of flesh and blood; it was changed or transformed, or was a body or "habitation" from heaven. Paul, as we have seen, has no interest in the empty tomb, and never refers to the risen Jesus as walking or eating or being touched with hands of flesh. It does not follow from this, however, that he did not suppose that the risen Jesus had a body which was connected in some historical and genetic way with his earthly body. He carried over into his Christian doctrine the belief of his Pharisaic circle in the resurrection of the dead; he believed that all dead and buried Christians would be raised from the dead, and that the bodies of those who were alive in the great day would be changed, not annihilated.

Most modern scholars who accept the doctrine of a bodily resurrection adopt more or less fully what seems to be the view of Paul. The risen body was in a true sense identical with the body which was buried; but it was changed, transfigured, transubstantiated, spiritualized. The identity is explained in various ways. The late Doctor Hovey held that matter can be made a more supple and perfect organ of spirit than it now is, that is, may be made to move with the swiftness of light and the power of electricity at the

indwelling spirit's behest.¹⁸ This is actual, material identity, though the matter has been sublimated.

Another view is that the material of the body disappeared, and in some way a spiritual body sprang out of it, in such a manner that it had the identity of genetic origin. Latham holds that "the body exhaled or evanesced,"¹⁹ and says, if asked, "'How do you explain this vanishing from the tomb of the material flesh and bones of Christ? This change into something which has all the phenomena without the substance of a human body?' My answer is ready, and it is, to my mind, a triumphant one: 'I do not explain it at all.'" ²⁰ David Smith ²¹ and Swete ²² seem to think that the power of the risen body to resist or ignore the ordinary conditions of bodily life was but the perfecting of the power revealed in his previous life when he passed suddenly from place to place (Luke 4 30, John 5 13, 8 59), and walked on the water, and was transfigured on the mountain. On the contrary, Bernhard Weiss says of the resurrection body: "There is a docetic trait in it of which Jesus' earlier earthly life does not show a trace."²³ Westcott, in an interesting personal letter printed in the *Hibbert Journal* for July, 1904, appeals to the doctrine of an idealistic philosophy, saying: "Matter is, so far as I can see, only the manifestation of force, life in the widest sense, under the conditions of time and space. It has in itself no existence." When Jesus "entered into another form of existence under new conditions His life found a new embodiment."²⁴

This theory of a spiritual body, which sprang from or replaced the body of flesh that was laid in the grave, presents difficulties which its more cautious defenders frankly admit. In the first place, it decreases or destroys the significance of the empty tomb, if it does not actually turn it from an argument for the resurrection into a difficulty which demands explanation. It would require no great force of evidence to lead men to believe that the body of a vigorous young man, free from disease, which after suddenly

¹⁸ American Journal of Theology, IV (1900), 548.

¹⁹ The Risen Master, p. 36.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 18.

²¹ The Days of His Flesh, pp. 239, 273.

²² The Appearances of Our Lord after the Passion, p. 24.

²³ Life of Christ, III, 386.

²⁴ Hibbert Journal, II, 795.

ceasing to breathe had been taken from a cross upon which it had been fastened for a few hours, returned in a few hours more to life and a measure of vigor, left the tomb, and appeared to his friends and rekindled their hope and faith. We might attribute this to special, divine, restoring power—to a miracle, if we chose to apply that name to this conquest over pain and death. On the other hand, it may be beyond the range of our experience, but is not contrary to experience, to suppose that when Jesus' spirit left his body it clothed itself in some light, heavenly form, and through this form communicated with his disciples. The serious perplexity comes when we attempt to combine the two. We know more of the substance of human bodies and the laws which govern them than the ancients knew; we are more impressed with the uniform conditions to which such bodies submit. The human body is composed of certain well-known chemical substances, which pass through certain well-known processes after the vital force has departed. It is not, as it once was, a simple appeal to ignorance and mystery to say that one such body was taken in hand by a strange, heavenly chemistry, and converted into a spiritual body. To believe, not that God quickened and guided the forces which he has appointed and which he administers with such faithful uniformity, but that he destroyed the material which he had created or annulled the laws which he has appointed and administers, demands that we reject and ignore our knowledge. It is not a sufficient reply to such difficulties to say that God could do this. The question of what God can do is out of the range of our knowledge, and not a subject either of faith or rational speculation. The question is whether we can believe that he did it; whether this is the most reasonable explanation of the facts which we are trying to explain. It may be that difficulties of this kind have led some to hold that the risen body was the "individual ideal," or *Grundform*,²⁵ of the body laid in the grave. The same thought seems to find expression in the alternative view of a recent writer, who says, quoting Westcott, "We may suppose that the Lord took up into this Glorified Body the material elements of that human body which was laid in the grave, though . . . true personality lies in the preservation of the individual formula or law which rules the organization

²⁵ Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift, XIII (1902), 258.

in each case, and not in the actual but ever-changing organization which may exist at any moment.”²⁶ But faith in such identity is embarrassed, not aided, by the appeal to the empty grave. The identity must be in the undying spirit, and not in the transubstantiated flesh.

It is manifest, further, that the hypothesis that the body which was buried a material body was raised a spiritual body does not agree with all the phenomena described in the Gospels. The risen Lord suddenly appears and disappears; he is not always promptly recognized; his voice does not always reveal him; he enters doors which have been shut; and finally he disappears from view in the clouds. Here we have suggestions of a spiritual body, if we know how to apprehend such a body, but slight suggestion of identity with the body which was buried. On the other hand we are told that this body which appeared to the women and the disciples bore the wounds of the crucifixion, consisted of flesh and bones, and partook of food. Such a body may well have come from the grave, but we shrink from calling it a spiritual body. We seem to have two conceptions interwoven in the same accounts, but not harmonized or adjusted to any unifying idea. It is not strange that Paul ignored or rejected these grosser features, if, indeed, they were in the tradition which he had received or transmitted. Many who affirm their faith in a spiritual body which is in some way to be identified with the material body that was buried have boldly followed what seems to be his example, saying plainly that eating and the other physical acts and attributes are inconceivable, and that Luke 24 4-43 records “an unhistorical tradition,”²⁷ “a naïve error of tradition,”²⁸ an impossibility,²⁹ a secondary feature,³⁰ or, perhaps a “later idea.”³¹

Others (as Garvie³² and Bernard³³) regard these as mere signs:

²⁶ Church Quarterly Review, January, 1906, p. 341.

²⁷ David Smith, Expositor, Sixth Series, VIII, 359.

²⁸ W. Beyschlag, Studien und Kritiken, 1899, p. 532.

²⁹ E. G. Steude, Die Auferstehung Jesu Christi, p. 20.

³⁰ F. Loofs, Die Auferstehungsberichte und ihr Wert, p. 28.

³¹ B. Weiss, Life of Christ, III, 391.

³² Studies in the Inner Life of Jesus, p. 434.

³³ Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, IV, 234.

eating was to prove identity, not to satisfy a need. The Lord assumed "a form which bore on it the marks of the Crucifixion. . . . The sign was only wanted for a temporary need."³⁴ But such explanations attribute to the acts a purpose hardly consistent with sincerity. Showing wounds and eating food must leave certain impressions which the theory implies were not in accordance with the real needs and conditions of the risen body.

Still others are content to affirm that this eating was simply a miracle which cannot be explained;³⁵ and which, it must be added, seems to demand the belief that "a piece of a broiled fish," as well as the body of the Lord, passed through this miraculous transmutation. Westcott,³⁶ Randolph,³⁷ and Weber³⁸ hold that the phrase "flesh and bones" in Luke 24 39 is not inconsistent with the conditions of a spiritual body, as "flesh and blood" (1 Cor. 15 50) would have been; as if flesh combined with blood would be material, but with bones spiritual! Flesh and bones are the constituent parts which would be in evidence in presenting such proof as the text contemplates.

The fact is that there are difficulties with this hypothesis of a spiritual body which are not removed by simply rejecting or skillfully explaining these more materialistic features of the Gospel narrative. If we are asked to believe that the risen Jesus appeared in a spiritual body, we must have some apprehension of the nature and constitution of such a body. Does it consist of matter—transubstantiated matter, we may call it, but nevertheless matter, and therefore still under the laws which govern matter? If the Galilean women and disciples, and even the Pharisee Paul, had been asked this question, and could have understood its import as we do, they would doubtless have answered: "Yes, it was matter, though greatly refined and etherealized. This body could do what other bodies cannot do; but whatever it did was done under the laws which rule organic matter. The body moved with unusual ease and rapidity, and, perhaps, passed through substances which check the movement of ordinary bodies, but it existed in a limited

³⁴ H. Latham, *The Risen Master*, p. 74.

³⁵ H. B. Swete, *The Appearances of Our Lord after the Passion*, p. 50.

³⁶ *The Gospel of the Resurrection*, p. 162.

³⁷ *The Empty Tomb*, pp. 15-16.

³⁸ *Monist*, April, 1901, p. 393.

space, it was not ubiquitous; it reflected sunlight or lamplight, and was visible to eyes of flesh; it had organs of speech, and uttered words which were projected through the vibrating air to ears of flesh." We speak of the grosser and finer features in the incidents described in the Gospels, and reject or carefully explain the former that we may hold consistently the latter; but if there is a difference, it is merely one of degree. If the disciples saw a body and heard it speak, they were not inconsistent in regarding it as a body of flesh and bones, at least of the substance of which flesh and bones are made; it was the body of one who had returned to a limited, circumscribed life, conditioned by the laws and forces which govern nature. Nor is there any radical difference between these revelations and those made later to Stephen, to Paul, and to the writer of the Apocalypse. There is nothing which we know of the possibilities of matter which either forbids or justifies the hypothesis that such a body once revealed itself to the eyes and ears of men. But this idea does not seem to reach to the conception which Christian faith holds of its eternal and exalted Saviour. If we accept it, we must hold to this view of a life limited by a refined, transcendent, but material, body. If it is suggested that the body was not refined matter, but something else, of which we know nothing, we may be tempted to say: That is out of the range of our knowledge and of an intelligent faith. But a better answer lies at hand: If we believe that the Lord, after his crucifixion, had a body at all, it is because we accept the testimony of the witnesses, which testimony points decidedly to a body that made the impression of a material organism, and because nothing we have learned since justifies us in substituting anything else for this.

Difficulties of this kind have led some recent scholars to conclude that the spirit of Jesus did not return to an organized body of any kind. His disembodied spirit was present with his disciples, though perhaps not confined to those places where they chanced to be present. His communion with them was that of a spirit with spirits, and there was no need of bodily organs and faculties to connect these kindred spirits or to intervene between them. Even ordinary human spirits dwelling in the flesh, it is thought by some, may sometimes communicate impressions and thoughts to others, without appealing to physical organs, even when their bodies are

too far separated to make such appeal possible. If that is possible, it is thought that the spirit of Jesus, freed from earthly, material limitations, may have enlightened the minds, quickened the memories, and kindled the faith and courage of his disciples by direct action upon their spirits. Some have even ventured to suggest the possibility that modern research into certain striking phenomena which arouse the suspicion that spirits not dwelling in earthly bodies can commune with men, may throw some light upon the question. Lake says, "Phenomena have certainly been registered by observers of high scientific and moral position, which may point to the conclusion that men who were known to them personally, and died recently, are still capable of communicating with them."³⁹ Horn says that Weisse, Hülsmann, and Fichte held to a spiritualistic power of the dead to recall themselves to the living.⁴⁰ Not many, however, have faith enough in this recent and occult science to appeal to it in support of what they term "the objective-vision hypothesis." This view was set forth in an able and impressive way by Keim⁴¹ some years ago. This seems to be the view of Stapfer,⁴² and of Lake,⁴³ Rolleston,⁴⁴ and E. A. Abbott.⁴⁵ The thought is that such deep and vivid impressions made upon the minds of the disciples by the spirit of Jesus would inevitably, in men of their ways of thinking, assume forms which would seem to be external to those who experienced them; the assurance of Jesus' presence would seem to be a vision of him appearing before the eyes, and the thoughts which he impressed upon their minds would express themselves in words uttered and heard. Even if experiences were not quite so vivid and realistic at the moment when they occurred, imaginative Orientals could not report them in any other than an objective way, which would inevitably become more graphic and detailed as it was repeated.

This view is, of course, rejected by those who hold that the empty grave furnishes essential witness to the fact of Jesus' re-

³⁹ *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 245.

⁴⁰ *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, XIII, 475-476.

⁴¹ *Jesus of Nazara*, VI, 360-365.

⁴² *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 256.

⁴³ *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, pp. 274-275.

⁴⁴ *Hibbert Journal*, IV, 637.

⁴⁵ *Apologia*, p. 75.

newed presence with his disciples; and some who do not regard that as a certainly established fact or as of vital doctrinal importance still regard this theory as a kind of makeshift, which does not fit well into the gospel stories. Bernhard Weiss ⁴⁶ and Rhees,⁴⁷ while they do not accept the theory, think it not inconsistent with a true faith in the essential doctrine of the resurrection. The weight of any direct argument for it will best appear after we have considered the theory next presented and discussed.

The theory of subjective visions. This is founded upon the belief that, so far as objective realities are concerned, the disciples were in relations not radically different from those which surround other Christian men. God was, indeed, near them, as he is to all pious souls, and Jesus was the inspiration, the teacher and guide, that he is for all Christians; but he was no nearer to them than he is to all who love and follow him, and assumed no form through which to communicate with them which is not the means of communicating with others. The visions, then, were purely subjective; perfectly normal, in the sense that they sprang from those forces and were developed under those laws which pertain to the normal spiritual life of men. They can be explained without appeal to the miraculous, in the sense of that word which sets aside or interferes with the uniform action of God in the material or spiritual life of men. This is the view of Schmiedel,⁴⁸ and his pupil Arno Neumann,⁴⁹ and of Eck,⁵⁰ and is most fully and ably discussed and defended by Arnold Meyer.⁵¹ Some who seem to decide for a spiritual body or an objective vision seem to regard this as a possible explanation of the phenomena. Stapfer asks, "What . . . is the use of asking whether the visions were exterior or interior?" ⁵² Edwin A. Abbott, though he has said, "The body of Christ did not leave the tomb. But the spirit of the Savior came (according to the testimony of Paul) in visible form and with audible

⁴⁶ *Life of Christ*, III, 390.

⁴⁷ *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 213.

⁴⁸ *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, IV, cols. 4080 f.

⁴⁹ *Jesus* (English translation), pp. 164-170.

⁵⁰ *Über die Bedeutung der Auferstehung Jesu für die Urgemeinde und für Uns*, p. 29.

⁵¹ *Die Auferstehung Christi*, pp. 290-315.

⁵² *The Death and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 256.

voices not only to single persons—Peter, James, and Paul himself—but also to groups of disciples,” adds a few pages later: “As to the statement of my view, as being that ‘the belief in the resurrection of Christ was based on certain visions,’ it is correct, but I should prefer to state it differently: ‘*It was based on the personality of Christ, and on spiritual or psychological laws.*’” “When dead to the eyes of the flesh, He appeared to the eyes of their spirits and dwelt permanently in their hearts.”⁵³ One cannot doubt that one main argument which draws towards this conclusion is the modern shyness in accepting the miraculous; or—to put it more affirmatively and religiously, and really more justly and accurately—the disposition to believe that God’s ways in both the material and spiritual administration of the world are uniform. No age has ever been more ready than ours to recognize that strange and mysterious things happen—things not easily explained by our present knowledge of the forces active in the world. But when these things are recognized, it is not the habit of thoughtful men of this age to attribute them without further inquiry to some divine interposition, breaking in upon the established course of divine providence or grace. This is not an irreligious, nor even a sceptical state of mind; it is, at least in many cases, profoundly religious, based on faith, not on unbelief—faith in the infinite wisdom and power and the immutability of God. It is not due to a loss of faith in the uniqueness and the supremacy of Christ, but rather to confidence in him as truly the Son of God, who entered into God’s order, respected his laws, and from first to last illustrated in a supreme way the spirit and method in which the children of God should accept and interpret God’s ways with men. Now men who cultivate this spirit, when they read the records of the New Testament, cannot avoid the inquiry, Is there not at least some tentative, hypothetical way of explaining even the most wonderful parts of these records which recognizes them as illustrations and expressions of God’s uniform ways with men?

No one can attempt to explain eclipses, diseases, cures, striking historical events, religious movements and experiences, in this way, and then, when he studies the New Testament, neglect or

⁵³ *Apologia*, pp. 75, 79, 80.

reject his method. To do that would, sooner or later, throw the New Testament out of the realm of serious studies. It will not do, either, to begin by accepting its statements, literally interpreted, and then simply to attempt to justify them to modern ways of thinking. That would be only half serious. The student of the New Testament must, like every other student of history or ancient literature, strive to get behind the record, and discover, so far as possible, the underlying facts. It is this irresistible tendency which has forced some modern scholars to raise the question whether the conviction which arose in the minds of certain persons that they had seen the Lord Jesus alive after his death and burial, may not be accounted for by an appeal to forces and laws which are uniform in human life.

It is a well-known fact that seeing visions is a common experience among people who have active, imaginative minds, especially among those who have deep religious experiences and intense spiritual desires. The disciples of Jesus belonged to a race which was controlled by such experiences and desires. The Old Testament records many such visions, described in very vivid and realistic terms; and other literature of Jewish origin, especially the apocalypses, abound in such descriptions.

In some cases this may be simply a literary device; but even in those cases its literary value is due to the fact that it appeals to the imagination as real and objective. In many cases, moreover, the seer, or the writer who recorded his visions, must have thought of the scenes described as having some kind of objective reality. Whatever may have been the first impression which lies behind the story of the appearance of the dead Samuel to the woman of Endor, the vision of horses and chariots of fire seen by Elisha's servant, and Isaiah's magnificent vision in the sixth chapter of his prophecy, there can be no doubt that the descriptions given of these scenes were regarded as recording something that was real and objective. The same was doubtless true of the various accounts of the appearance of angels who were seen by men, and conversed and even ate with them. Nor are such scenes confined to the earlier records of the Old Testament. Three of the disciples are reported to have seen Moses and Elijah on a mountain, conversing with their Master; dead saints leave

their tombs and appear to many (Matt. 27 53); Peter sees a sheet laden with animals descend from heaven; Paul beholds a man from Macedonia appearing to him at Troas and inviting him to come to Macedonia; he also has interviews with Jesus, not only on the Damascus way but in other places and at other times. The dying Stephen beholds the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God; and the Lord converses with Ananias. Angels are often seen, sometimes acting on material substances, such as rolling a stone, opening prison doors, smiting a man with death, singing, and conversing with men. Some of these descriptions may be intended as graphic figures or metaphors; but even then the significance of such figures is due to the belief in a reality which suggests them. There can be no doubt that those who recorded such instances frequently believed that they were relating objective facts; and we have every reason to believe that those who had such experiences viewed them as due to the visible and audible presence of the beings to whom they ascribe them.

If there are cases, as in the apocalypses and elsewhere, where it was not the intention to describe in literal terms an objective reality, even such cases may aid in interpreting the sections of the New Testament now under discussion. There can be no question that in ancient and modern times men of glowing imaginations often relate their experiences and express their convictions in this form of poetic and imaginative description. Jeremiah *sees* two baskets of figs set before the temple; Jesus *sees* Satan as lightning fallen from heaven; and the author of the Apocalypse *sees* the scenes of the future which he describes. The feature appears even in modern religious writings. F. B. Meyer thus describes a decisive experience in his own religious life. He was walking among the hills at Keswick in the night, depressed over his religious state, when—to quote his own words—“A voice said to me: ‘As you took forgiveness from the hand of the dying Christ, take the Holy Ghost from the hand of the living Christ.’ I turned to Christ and said: ‘Lord, as I breathe in this whiff of warm night air, so I breathe into every part of me the blessed Spirit.’” A little later he says: “I turned to leave the mountain side, and as I went down the tempter said: ‘You have got nothing. It is moonshine.’ I

said: 'I have.' He said: 'Do you feel it?' 'I do not.' 'Then, if you do not feel it, you have not got it.' I said: 'I do not feel it, but I reckon that God is faithful, and he could not have brought a hungry soul to claim by faith, and then give a stone for bread, and a scorpion for a fish. I know I have got it because God led me to claim.'" ⁵⁴ There is nothing more realistic or objective in the reports of conversations between the disciples and the risen Christ. Is it not possible that the experiences which lie behind the formal conversations recorded in the Gospels were somewhat like that which marked the crisis in the life of Mr. Meyer?

A still more striking illustration of this habit of describing what are believed to be real experiences may be found in Burkhardt's interesting and suggestive book upon the resurrection of the Lord. He does not hesitate to give lengthy accounts of the appearances of Jesus to Peter, James, and the mother of Jesus. These scenes are realistic in detail, as if they were reports from eye-witnesses. Those scenes which appear in the Gospels, and the words which are recorded there, are reconstructed; Jesus is made to say to the women, "Fear ye not; but only renew your trust in me. I am actually the same whom ye long ago had learned to know as your Saviour." Salome is reported as saying to Peter, "We have for thee an entirely special commission: when the angel showed us the empty grave he said," etc.⁵⁵ This is entirely honest and simple-minded; but if Herr Burkhardt had written his book in the first century, instead of at the end of the nineteenth, it would have opened up many interesting and perplexing questions for New Testament critics. But is this way of relating deep experiences, this habit of attributing to actors in significant events words and situations which spring from the imagination of the narrator, something new to story tellers? Is it reasonable to recognize this feature and make allowance for it in the discourse or writing of a modern Christian, but unscientific to expect to find and seek to detect the same characteristic in the writings of the Evangelists? Indeed, when we

⁵⁴ A Castaway, p. 96.

⁵⁵ Die Auferstehung des Herrn und seine Erscheinungen, pp. 99, 119, 120.

compare one Gospel with another and with the extant fragments of early uncanonical gospels, we see that the same spirit and method ruled in those days. Each writer felt at liberty to recast the tradition which came into his hands; to add from other sources, or, apparently, like the excellent Herr Burkhardt, from his own vivid imagination; to omit what he did not care to repeat, and to change words and sentences in what he retained. We cannot now dissect out of these stories that which was their original form, their primitive germ; we cannot know just what the first experience of those who saw the Lord was; but we can recognize the probability that it was something simpler, perhaps less objective, than appears in the stories which went from lip to lip for many a year before they were recorded in their present form, or which, if you please, lay in the brooding, fructifying memory of one or two intense, imaginative men, who finally wrote them down, not as dry annalists, but with the fervor of spiritual and poetic genius.

But there must have been a germ; there must have been real, primitive experiences, from which these narratives and the great spiritual movement which preserved them and gave them form, sprang. The scientific temper of our own age forbids us to believe that great convictions and great movements spring from nothing, or from vain superstition and foolish blunders. The men who said that they had seen the Lord, and retained this conviction through years of labor and persecution, and convinced others that they were right, and thus founded and inspired the church of Christ, could not have been mistaken in the real, spiritual substance of this conviction. They had a foundation for their belief quite as good as an empty tomb, a human form seen moving about, and words that set the air in vibration; better, perhaps, than a localized, limited, spiritual presence, which impressed itself upon their sensorium or upon their souls. What may that have been? It may have been the focalizing, or the bursting into life, of experiences and convictions which had found lodgement in their souls through many a day. They were Jews, accepting without doubt the Pharisaic belief in the immortality of souls and the resurrection of the dead; from their earliest youth they had believed that the Messiah was to come and redeem Israel;

they had come to a strong belief in Jesus as the promised Messiah; they thought that the time was near when he would reveal his power and establish his kingdom; they had heard him predict temporary disaster, perhaps death, for himself; but with these predictions there was the promise also that he would surely return to take up again his task and complete it. The words in which these predictions were recorded in the Gospels may be more definite than those which the Master spoke, but it is hardly to be doubted that he gave such assurances. The disciples were not prepared, indeed, for the dreadful catastrophe; when it fell, it shocked and stunned them. But what was more natural, more in accord with God's ways with men and the normal processes of human souls, than that first one and then another should react from this crushing blow, and should recover the faith which had been planted and nourished in their souls? They could not doubt that their Lord's spirit still lived, and that he would take up again and perfect the work to which he had given himself, and which he had often promised to carry to its perfection. Faith, not hopelessness, was normal for them, and they sprang back into their normal state. Moreover, their natural, perhaps their only, way of conceiving of the return of Jesus to his task was through his resurrection. "The Spirit was not yet," we are told by one of the Evangelists; the capacity to lay hold of their Lord as a purely incorporeal presence had not yet developed; they must think of him as in a body revealed to their eyes; the words which echoed in their hearts seemed to sound in their ears, and they could not report such experiences without putting them in this form. Furthermore, if one or more of those who had these experiences began to relate them in that way, not only the spiritual experience but the form of apprehending and relating it would be contagious. If Simon Peter or Mary Magdalene said, with glowing face and ardent tones, "I have seen the Lord, and he has spoken to me," others would almost inevitably have similar visions. One knows little of the history of religious ecstasies who objects that, while experiences of this kind might occur in a single soul, they could not be shared by a group of a dozen, or five hundred, people.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Arnold Meyer, *Die Auferstehung Christi*, pp. 217-272.

It was remarked in the Acts of the Apostles that Jesus appeared, "not to all the people, but unto witnesses who were chosen before of God," and many recent writers upon the resurrection have called attention to the fact that, with one notable exception to be considered later, there are no witnesses except those who had already become his disciples. Those who most confidently defend the doctrine of a bodily resurrection are impressed with this fact. Horn thinks it was due to the fact that the eyes of others "were holden";⁵⁷ David Smith holds that the risen body "was invisible to the natural eye," and could be seen only by those "endowed with spiritual vision";⁵⁸ Simpson observes, "If it be true that the eye sees precisely what it brings with it the power to see, perception will vary with receptivity";⁵⁹ and Skrine declares, "Only those who had love could be in the life-relation with Christ. Given this love, the sense-perception becomes possible."⁶⁰ Latham says, "This body was rendered cognizable by human senses—touch as well as sight—when He so would have it, and only then."⁶¹

These various views and conjectures all rest upon the conviction that the apprehension of the risen Master was, in some way, subjective and visionary: it was not simply the ordinary observation of an objective reality, but was due to a peculiar state of mind in the observers. Such explanations approximate the hypothesis of subjective visions, and raise the question whether it is not reasonable to attribute to the mental and spiritual condition of the witnesses even more than these scholars attribute.

The case of the Apostle Paul is, indeed, in some degree exceptional. He had not been a follower of Jesus; and we cannot suppose that, on his way to Damascus, his heart was controlled by faith in him and passionate desire to see him. But Paul had a genuine Pharisee's belief in the future life and the resurrection of the dead, and he had an intense longing for the redemption of his people; he doubtless fully believed in revelations from the

⁵⁷ *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*, XIII, 359.

⁵⁸ *The Days of His Flesh*, p. 524.

⁵⁹ *Our Lord's Resurrection*, p. 116.

⁶⁰ *Contemporary Review*, December, 1904, p. 865.

⁶¹ *The Risen Master*, p. 22.

world beyond, and he was, as we know, a man predisposed to visionary experiences; his religious life did not satisfy his soul, and he had had for some months a contact with Christians which must have left deep impressions upon his mind, and kindled feelings of regret and restless longing; we are told that he stood by when the martyr Stephen cried aloud, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." He, too, had had his preparation for a vision of Christ; and the reaction and revulsion of feeling are quite as normal as the propulsion which acted upon other witnesses. (See Schmiedel,⁶² von Dobschütz,⁶³ Schwartzkopff,⁶⁴ Eck.⁶⁵)

The experience of Charles G. Finney in this, as in some other respects, closely resembles that of Paul. Until the time of his conversion, he seems to have been nearly as ignorant of Christ, if not as hostile to him, as was Saul of Tarsus. He thus describes his own experience at the time of his conversion:

There was no fire, and no light, in the room; nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light. As I went in and shut the door after me, it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. It did not occur to me then, nor did it for some time afterward, that it was wholly a mental state. On the contrary it seemed to me that I saw him as I would see any other man. He said nothing, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at his feet. . . . It seemed to me a reality, that he stood before me, and I fell down at his feet and poured out my soul to him.

Of a later experience he says:

The day was just beginning to dawn. But all at once a light perfectly ineffable shone in my soul, that almost prostrated me to the ground. . . . This light seemed to be like the brightness of the sun in every direction. It was too intense for my eyes. . . . I think I knew something then, by

⁶² *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, IV, col. 4081.

⁶³ *Ostern und Pfingsten*, p. 25.

⁶⁴ *The Prophecies of Jesus Christ relating to His Death, Resurrection and Second Coming*, pp. 101-104.

⁶⁵ *Über die Bedeutung der Auferstehung Jesu für die Urgemeinde und für Uns*, pp. 13-17.

actual experience, of that light that prostrated Paul on his way to Damascus.⁶⁶

The fact is, as one of the sturdy advocates of a bodily resurrection says: The "ultimate belief [of the disciples] did not rest upon outward or circumstantial evidence, but upon intuitive insight, upon the conviction that had grown up in them from their having lived with their Master." "The belief which our Lord wanted His followers to possess was to come mainly from within; the supports from without were only subordinate."⁶⁷ But if we find our confidence in those supports from without growing weak by reason of the conceptions of God's ways of dealing with his world and his children which we are forced to accept, must those evidences which come from within fail, or suffer serious loss? We should be poor indeed if our faith in Christ, in his doctrine and his scheme of life, in his purpose and his promise to redeem the souls of men, in his revelation of the heavenly Father's love and the Holy Spirit's constant ministry to men, rested upon such evidence as we possess that his grave was deserted on the third day, and his body, transmuted into some strange substance which both submitted to and transcended the laws which govern organic matter, was seen and heard to speak, and finally vanished in the clouds. These narratives have doubtless enlisted the attention and commanded and strengthened the faith of many people. But vital truth is not in the forms in which it expresses itself, but in the deep, irresistible response which spirit gives to spirit. The forms must change that the truth may live and continue to produce its fruit. Perhaps Christianity would not have gained its earliest conquests without the Easter message, "The Lord hath risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." But it does not follow from this that the faith which that message expressed may not survive and grow strong after the formal conception expressed by those who first uttered these words has been adjusted to other views of the relation of the eternal spirit of Christ to a bodily organism. It may be doubtful whether Jesus would have made his connections with the men of his time if his first disciples

⁶⁶ *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney*, pp. 19, 20, 34.

⁶⁷ *H. Latham, The Risen Master*, pp. 74, 75.

had not taken him as the Jewish Messiah. But for how long was that interpretation of him and his mission of real significance to his church? The name, in a Greek translation, was retained, but the nature and functions of the Jewish Messiah were obliterated in interpretations which came in part from Greek philosophy but in the main from his own moral and spiritual transcendence, so that, by a strange transmutation, even the term which described an anointed prince or leader has come to denote to many an eternal hypostasis in the divine being. It may be questioned whether Christianity would have so rapidly won its place and so fully inspired men if it had not proclaimed that Christ was soon to come again on the clouds of heaven, to raise those who were in their graves, to judge the world, and to establish his kingdom. But the years and centuries have passed without this stupendous catastrophe, and the church has lived on, adjusting its views to the demands of history; and, though the form of its apprehension has changed, it still lives by its faith in the triumph of Christ and his kingdom. There is no article of the Christian faith which rests upon the conviction that Jesus left the grave and revealed himself in visible and audible form to a few people during a few days or weeks. As several recent writers have acknowledged or affirmed, the doctrine of immortality does not rest upon the evidence that Jesus was seen alive after his burial. (See Rolleston,⁶⁸ Riggenbach,⁶⁹ Arnold Meyer,⁷⁰ Fenn,⁷¹ and others.) The supremacy or divinity of the Lord Jesus is not dependent upon the establishment of this as a fact, nor is the hope of the ultimate triumph of his kingdom of righteousness in the earth. Our faith in these things rests in Jesus himself, in what he taught and what he did and what he showed himself to be, not in one experience through which he passed. Indeed, the belief that he was raised from the dead rests upon the impression which his life and teachings have made; and no one would be able, or would care, to defend the story of his resurrection, except from faith in his transcendent nature and worth. The question presses whether

⁶⁸ Hibbert Journal, IV, 631.

⁶⁹ Die Auferstehung Jesu, p. 36.

⁷⁰ Die Auferstehung Christi, p. 332.

⁷¹ American Journal of Theology, XII (1908), 565.

the Christian faith gains anything in power to convince the mind or to inspire the soul by striving to make the evidence that Jesus' body was raised to life a connecting link between his own spiritual being and the spirits of believers.

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